



CASE STUDY 6

Supporting the Identification and Assessment of Needs

Introduction

This is one of six case studies that have been written as 'finger-tip' guides to inform and enrich your support for students with SEND. Each offers an accessible, evidence-informed summary of advice. This support is both immediately actionable and can be used to enrich further discussions. All the case studies are aimed at supporting busy professional colleagues so that they can further develop their inclusive educational practices. Other case studies in the series include:

- Case Study 1: Supporting Students During a National Emergency
- Case Study 2: Supporting Students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs
- Case Study 3: Appreciating the Role of the SENCO
- Case Study 4: Improving Attendance, Behaviour and Inclusion
- Case Study 5: Supporting Vulnerable Groups of Students in Our Schools

Each case study follows the same format. They are divided into six short sections, the first being a summary as to why this particular study might be relevant to you. The next section shares selected professional knowledge that could help to inform your context. The third section offers a summary of key motivations for change. Section four offers some ways to address these. The final two sections build on this by highlighting how professional support can be further developed, including identifying selected further sources of support.

We very much hope that you will find these guides to be both informative and actionable. We wish you well in your endeavours and thank you for all that you do for your learners.

1. Why this Case Study might be relevant to you.

It is recognised that SENCOs need to have a knowledge of a wide range of additional needs. They also need to know how to access diagnostic assessments to enable them to identify additional needs quickly in order to offer appropriate support and apply for funding. This Case Study highlights the issues that some schools experienced in identification of need and assessment and then to share with other school some of the strategies that they used that were impacting. In the final section, suggestions are made that might be helpful for senior leaders in governance roles both within schools and beyond. The reviewers were reminded of the importance of schools' legal responsibilities to identify and assess students with SEND. The role of the SENCO was reviewed (using the SEND Code of Practice 2015)

2. Accessing Professional Knowledge

To help to inform our responses, we accessed the support offered by the Whole School Send network <https://nasen.org.uk/page/about-whole-school-send-wss>. This recognises that most children and young people in mainstream schools will have their special educational needs met through good classroom practice. In deciding whether to make special education provision to support educational, social, physical or emotional needs, they recommend that SENCOs:

- Work in partnership with parents/carers, pupils
- Consult with relevant external agencies
- Use assessment tools and materials
- Use observations
- Use Short Notes

Where a pupil is identified as having a special educational need they recommend that SENCOs follow a **graduated approach** which takes the form of cycles of “**Assess, Plan, Do, Review**”.

The ‘assess, plan, do, review’ cycle (ADPR) is incorporated into SEN provision through formative assessment on a day-to-day basis and through more formal reviews of pupil progress and progress towards support plan targets. These should be discussed with parents/carers in regular meetings as well as on a more informal basis.

Parents/carers and pupils are involved in the ADPR cycle through both informal and formal meetings. There are regular opportunities for parents to discuss progress informally with the class teacher and formal opportunities in SEN review meetings and parents’ evenings. Children’s targets and progress are discussed with them at an appropriate level. Children know what they are working on and are involved in evaluating and celebrating their successes

As part of this approach every child with SEN will have an individualised SEN Support Plan that describes the child’s needs, outcomes & provision to meet those needs. Parents/carers and child/YP (where appropriate) views are integral to this process.

A small percentage of children and young people with significant and/or complex needs may require an assessment that could lead to an Education, Health and Care Plan.

An EHC assessment would be carried out where the current levels of support and intervention are not leading to improved progress for the child and where further support might be needed to ensure the needs of an individual child are fully met.

Current additional EHCP support includes specialist speech, language and communication support, additional support for children with physical difficulties to access the full curriculum, emotional and social support for children where this is impacting on their learning and additional support with cognition and learning to ensure that the pace and level of learning meets the needs of the child.

We recommend that teachers and support staff no matter how experienced regularly access training in order to further develop their practice.

3. Key Motivations for Change

As professionals, we are always ambitious to do more for our young people. In order to do this we found that it can often be helpful to clarify both our motivations for change and to identify some of the dilemmas that we face. By making these explicit, we can then prioritise strategies that might help us to address such concerns. We hope that you may find the lists below helpful. There could be both some drivers and dilemmas noted here that you also recognise. As you consider these insights, you may find yourself thinking of others, which are not recorded here. Please share them in your own teams and see if any of the strategies shared in section four might be helpful.

Drivers

We identified that we were ambitious to:

- Ensure that SENCOs has access to appropriate assessment tools in combination with access to ongoing professional development opportunities so as to update their knowledge in relation to specific students in their schools.
- Support SENCOs in planning ahead so that any diagnostic assessments which relied on specialist input e.g. autism or speech, language and communication needs were carried out in a timely way.
- Enable SENCOs to access information so that they could access cost effective diagnostic tools
- Support the efficient and effective sharing of assessment data with both the SENCO and relevant colleagues so as to support the timely identification of needs. This enabled support to be appropriately implemented.
- Ensure that appropriate staff can access training to enable the consistent and purposeful use of appropriate assessments.

Dilemmas

We identified that we were concerned by:

- Outside agency assessments being limited by the school's financial constraints.
- The time that it could take for the students to be assessed by outside agencies
- The lack of access to Educational Psychologists and this increased the time assessments took to complete e.g. EHCP applications.
- SENCOs reporting difficulties in establishing systems to share good practice across school and with other colleagues, especially during COVID times where groups of students were segregated.

- Time was also a limiting factor, as opportunities to share good practice and ideas were reduced, especially during lockdown where staff did not meet together in person.
- Access for funding depended on schools being able to implement a graduated approach, document outside agency involvement and have access to appropriate assessments to support AEN and EHC applications.

4. Putting professional knowledge and understanding to work.

By drawing on the support from NASEN and Whole School SEND in relation to the drivers and dilemmas listed above we then considered the evidence informed ways in which we could improve our professional practices. The list is indicative, rather than exhaustive. We have tried to highlight how each action created the time and space for us to be more effective.

- Schools employed staff with specialist qualifications. This enabled rapid assessment of students.
- Schools signed up to the NASEN Whole School SEND Gateway, to access further information about specific needs.
- Schools invested in tests / assessments.
- SENCOs used prior knowledge of assessments and specific needs to support early identification.
- The Local Authority in Stoke-on-Trent also offered traded (paid) access to specialist advisers, who could administer a wide range of assessments. They provided a report, analysed the results and suggested appropriate strategies.
- SENCOs completed an audit of skills and knowledge of all staff. They provided relevant training and updates for staff working with pupils with SEND.
- Schools embraced opportunities to work with SEND advisers from the local authority to learn how to best support pupils currently in their setting.
- Proactive SENCOs built strong relationships with outside agencies e.g. SALT, CAMHS.
- Proactive SENCOs monitored the timescale of outside agency assessments and proactively chased them if required.
- SENCOs participated in pupil progress meetings to set appropriate targets, support early identification and ensure appropriate support was in place.
- Senior Leadership Teams understood the SEND assessment processes and supported their SENCOs by funding CPD, assessment and resources.
- Proactive SENCOs sought greater awareness of the different diagnostic assessments available and expertise across the city.
- Senior Leadership Teams implemented a consistent approach to assessment that allowed for comparison between pupils, staff, and subjects.
- Access to relevant staff training and information about identification of need, assessment and funding impacted positively.

- Professional dialogues with other SENCOs as part of the SEND Review Project increased confidence and knowledge.

5. Contributing to collective professional knowledge

The strategies prioritised in section 4 will often be enacted by individual members of our school teams, supported by our whole school ethos. In our reviews we also found it particularly helpful to highlight strategies that will depend on our collective and collaborative endeavours. Here we share some approaches that could usefully inform local area dialogues.

- Consider providing SENCOs with training in how to use appropriate assessments to ensure quick, accurate identification of needs.
- Consideration given to providing a preventative service that supports schools with meeting students' needs rapidly prior to officially identifying needs.
- A recommendation that all professionals working with students with SEND have read, as a minimum, Chapter 6 of the SEND Code of Practice (2015)
- Make available an easily accessed list available to all Stoke on Trent schools which categorise the tests that are available to support diagnosis and how schools can access them

6. Sources of further information

SEND Code of Practice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

Nasen Whole School SEND Gateway

<https://nasen.org.uk/page/about-whole-school-send-wss>

Autism Education Trust

<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

British Dyslexia Association

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) – list of possible assessments.

<https://sasc.org.uk/>

‘A Square Peg in a Round Hole’ by Linda Tallent and Jean Thompson (Pub.Featherstone) - This book gives a description of a range of needs and possible strategies to try.